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THE PROBLEM OF THE EMOTIONS.

By GUSTAV SPILLER.

I.

The favorite theory of to-day concerning the nature of the emotions is probably that of Professors James and Lange, which claims, in Professor James's words, that "the genesis of an emotion is accounted for, as the arousal by an object of a lot of reflex acts which are forthwith felt" (*Principles of Psychology*, 1891, Vol. II, p. 454), or "that the bodily changes follow directly the perception of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion" (*Ibid.*, p. 449). In the absence of these bodily changes, it is said, we should for instance, "see the bear, and judge it best to run, receive the insult and deem it right to strike, but we should not actually feel afraid or angry" (p. 450). Accordingly, the strength of the physical excitement, and that alone, measures the emotion. A rival theory is that of Prof. Irons who, especially in a recent volume, urges that an emotion is something "unanalysable and irreducible" (*A Study in the Psychology of Ethics*, 1903, p. 39), and that its essence lies in a feeling-attitude which has an outward direction, and deals with what is significant. An emotion, according to him, is a peculiar central reaction differing from pleasure-pain and from excitement, for while pleasure-pain is, he claims, passive and subjective, emotions are reactive. Similarly, excitement is not to be regarded as an invariable property of emotion; but here, unfortunately, Prof. Irons can only cite in his favor the emotions of 'cool' contempt, 'dry' admiration, and 'cold' dislike (*Ibid.*, p. 25), and one or two similar emotions, which leaves his case unconvincing, especially since it would be open for Prof. James to reply that 'cool' contempt is only cool when there is very little of it, or one might reason that these few apparent emotions are not to be regarded as true ones, considering, especially, that of the enormous number of so-called emotions only a very few can be claimed as being unaccompanied by excitement. Furthermore, is it quite correct to speak of joy, grief, and satisfaction as being generally or always reactive? All that apparently remains unchallenged of Prof. Irons's theory is, therefore, that in some sense, emotions form

a class which must not be confused with intellect, feeling, or will.

The simplicity and plausibility of Prof. James's theory make it attractive and recommend it; but one would like to feel more certain that his theory is based on a sufficiently exhaustive examination of the essential nature of the emotions on the cognitive and volitional side, and that it represents a successful attempt to define off emotion from what is not emotion, or satisfactorily determines the elements out of which an emotion as such is compounded.

There are several states which must be distinguished from emotional states. We have certain needs, such as hunger and thirst, which move us to action; but these represent impulses rather than emotions. So, too, through acting for a period along a certain line, with emotion or without, an inclination or organized tendency is gradually formed that brings about reactions which are otherwise not infrequently connected with emotional outbursts. Where such an inclination is, passingly or permanently, connected with more or less strong feeling, we speak of a sentiment or a passion rather than of an emotion. Diffused excitement may also exist without emotion. A person may be 'upset' by everything, the excitement continuing long after the occasion is past or remembered. Here we have a case of unstrung nerves or general mental irritability as distinct from pure emotion which is directly aroused by some definite circumstance and does not merely express absence of general equilibrium; perhaps we ought to speak in such a case of a secondary emotion, since the excitement aroused depends on a persisting excitement due to a preceding emotion. One form which excitement takes is that of hysteria, and here the absence of a definite end conclusively betokens the absence of emotion. We also speak of moods and temperaments, and these, too, cannot be called emotions, for they are diffused and are only minimally determined by outward circumstances. Cravings, desires, and bodily and mental pleasure-pains must likewise be excluded, though it is still to a large extent an open question how far these and other states enter into emotions or are confused with them. From the preceding it will be seen that we have not as yet even a recognized selective hypothesis as regards what states are to be termed emotions, for it is questionable, for instance, whether any diffused excitement or mood should be regarded as non-emotional. However, Prof. Irons's excellent analyses in Chapter III of his quoted work are well worth studying in this connection.

What, then, is an emotion? It might be said that if we combined Prof. Irons's "feeling-attitude" with Prof. James's "perception of bodily symptoms," which are said to mark an emo-

tion, we should have discovered the tantalizing secret of the emotions. On this hypothesis we should argue that somehow the thought that "certain circumstances are deplorable," and the connected or unconnected bodily excitement constitute together the emotion of grief, and that the absence of either of these argues the absence of that emotion. Yet in my case, and this is the burden of the present paper, introspection tends to show that these two together do not constitute an emotion, for we should only have a certain cold and colorless statement and an unconnected and unaccountable bodily excitement, and that is all. We must evidently go deeper. Everything which affects us or moves us is in some degree significant, *e. g.*, I put the pen down now because I want to think. Here there is no emotion—or shall we say an infinitesimal amount of emotion?—and in normal action, of which this is typical, emotion plays accordingly no traceable part. Let us, however, say that I have to decide whether, seeing that my life is in danger, I should stay or run. If I am unexcitable and high-principled, I deliberate unexcitedly about the matter and finally reach some conclusion as to how to act, so, if there is no time, I coolly fight for my life. Here we observe an outwardly directed and decidedly significant thought and no excitement or emotion, and yet in another individual the emotion of fear is induced very readily, even apart from exceptional significance. Similarly with bodily excitement. What physical signs are there to divide emotional from non-emotional states? The presence and the intensity of anger, of fear, and of rejoicing can be discovered and measured by the peculiarity of the physical excitement only after we are aware of the nature and the degree of the related cognitive and volitional excitement.

Now an analysis of an emotion as experienced, will, if the analysis be correct, give us some glimpses of the secret we are desiring to bring to the light. Not so long ago I was steering a boat for the first time, and as the small river, the river Charwell at Oxford, was crowded with boats, I was naturally anxious that no accident should happen through my inexperience. The emotion of anxiety was here fully developed, and I spent part of my time, whilst steering, in studying that emotion. The result of that examination was a view of the nature of the emotions which was new to me, for I had been an indifferent disciple of Prof. James. (Gustav Spiller, *The Mind of Man*, 1902, p. 271.) I noticed that I was in a state of perplexity. I could rest neither in hope nor in fear. I wanted to do more than one thing at a time. I was straining to know what to do. I wished to settle several difficulties at once, and hence a scurrying to and fro of ideas, most of which were scotched or killed before they had fully emerged. Here there was no serene

statement "I am perplexed as to what I shall do," and an unconnected or connected physical excitement; but there presented itself instead a crowd of incomplete thoughts hastening they knew not whither, and repeated and vain attempts were made at finding solutions. This state of mind, then, independently even of any bodily excitement, seems to be an emotional state. In other words, where there is no excitement directly aroused by a definite object or idea there is no emotion, and the greater the excitement the greater the emotion. At the same time the resulting bodily changes are at least frequently a substantial part of the emotion, for in acute anger and fear, where there is usually a reference to the taking of immediate action, it is clear that various physical adjustments similar in purpose to the cognitive and volitional adjustments above described—primarily muscular, and secondarily nervous and vascular—will be attempted. An angry man who would strike but restrains himself is physically very nearly in the condition of him who does strike. Or to take the case of my steering, it is evident that my muscular system was, in an incomplete way, as active as my brain. Indeed, the ordinarily accepted ideomotor theory implies that even the most ideal cognition which refers to action involves a partial carrying out of that action, and from this it follows that where the mental excitement referring to action is great, the physical excitement will be great also, and where the mental excitement is at its lowest there the physical excitement will be also at its lowest. So long, then, as the ideational content of an emotion has reference to the initiation of bodily action, so long is it impossible to regard the mental and physical excitement as separable or as independent; as well speak of an experimenter manipulating an instrument, and separate his thought from his action, without robbing both processes of their meaning. It is not a question of bodily excitement giving rise to mental excitement or mental excitement giving rise to bodily excitement, since they are both substantial parts of one act. Moreover, we have to remember that there is such a process as a mental reverberation complementary to the physical reverberation, spoken of by Prof. James, for an important thought, or one in which we are immersed, or professional matter, ever comes uppermost, however strenuously we may endeavor to dismiss it; and likewise in an emotion, the mental reverberation, in accordance with this, lasts considerably beyond the initial moment of excitement, even after the basis for the excitement has been proved to be illusory. On Prof. James's theory, if I mistake not, the feelingless thought passes through the mind like a flash and there is an end to it; but in my emotional experience the problem suddenly raised by what provokes the emotion gives rise to a more or less tur-

bulent flow of thought which seeks, as in non-emotional experience, to meet the situation, and in proportion to the importance of the situation and the power of self-control there is produced a more or less orderly or chaotic mental condition. If only for the reason that Prof. James's theory does not seem to correspond faithfully to what we know of the normal workings of the human mind under the provocations which call out an emotional response, his theory does not appeal to the judgment as being readily defensible as regards its fundamental outlines. To this must be added that the power of suppressing certain emotions by inducing dissimilar bodily emotional attitudes, referred to by Prof. James, is paralleled by the well known fact that we can perhaps even more readily suppress emotions by turning our thoughts away into different or more desirable channels, and that certain classes of eccentricity and madness are consistent with the absence of any obvious emotional states. Our conclusion, then, must be that Prof. James is right in urging that physical excitement is present in emotion as an essential constituent; only we must hold that emotion also implies mental excitement, a more or less broken or hurried stream of thought tending to mental and bodily chaos when the excitement is great, and that these two series constitute properly only one series.

We have examined a pronounced form of the emotion of anxiety, a cousin to fear; but an analysis of any other emotion, say that of fear, will yield the same result. In unmistakable fear, for example, we are mentally overpowered; we try to think of ways of escape; we doubt whether we shall succeed; the thoughts hurry along wildly; we tend in many directions both as to thought and action; we are irresolute; we are in a highly strained condition as regards muscles and nerves, no sooner initiating movements than inhibiting them. Naturally, therefore, the body generally is thrown into a state of excitement, since muscles, nerves and blood vessels, as well as brain, are strongly affected, unless, indeed, the emotion is of a contemplative or minimal kind, though even here most probably we have no exception.

An emotion, of course, is not bound to find its expression in words, and close observation both of men and animals bears this out. To take a homely illustration from the farmyard, an escaped pig, vainly attempting to elude its pursuers when cornered in a chase, shows all the signs of fear which we might observe in a conscious human being, and the organized nature of all thought would point to the same conclusion. Sometimes, it is true, bodily excitement is out of proportion to the normal mental excitement (and *vice versa*); but here, owing to a morbid or other condition, the bodily excitement, and, indirectly

the mental, are over-emphasized and approach the stage of chaos. Where the emotion does not find its normal expression, there we speak accordingly of morbid fear or hope. However, it is quite within the range of possibility that now the bodily and now the mental excitement should be the more prominent.

This, then, seems to be the nature of an emotion. A certain more or less urgent need, aroused directly by some definite object or idea, is eagerly and yet vainly seeking to be satisfied. In so far as there is, as a consequence, mental excitement, a more or less turbulent endeavor to meet the situation in a satisfactory manner, so far the state becomes emotional, and the proportionate absence of this peculiar mental excitement argues the proportionate absence of an emotional coloring of new attitude. Such a definition excludes inclination, sentiment, passion, secondary emotions, mental and physical prostration and derangement, cool and deliberate judgment, habit, pleasure-pain, craving, desire, objectless excitement, temperament and moods, and seems to embrace nothing but pure emotional states and everything which characterizes these states. The definition likewise includes all pleasant emotional states such as rejoicing, for all emotions. like all pleasure-pain, argue a disturbance or absence of complete satisfaction. It explains also the origin in excitement of any and every attitude called an emotion and the necessary presence of physical excitement—even to the point of morbidity—when an emotion is observable, though it is somewhat difficult to reconcile this explanation with Prof. James's view which asserts that the perception itself, say that of a white sheet, immediately produces physical changes, the feeling or perception of which changes is supposed to be the emotion. Prof. Irons's 'cool' contempt also receives its explanation, for many attitudes are only minimally emotional and others are only by courtesy called emotionals. Besides, contempt may reach the stage of disgust, loathing and nausea, and be anything but free from excitement, while, on the other hand, our contemptuous attitude towards some one may merely imply that we have no very exalted opinion of him. In proportion as a state of mind becomes directly excited through a definite object or idea, so may we speak of the presence of emotion, and as the ideational stream takes different directions, so we speak of different emotions. Emotions, therefore, do not appear to be something unanalyzable, nor are they composed of a serene thought and pleasure-pain or bodily excitement; but in their essence they represent mental excitement produced directly through a definite object or idea, naturally combined with physical excitement, expressing the fused cognitive, volitional and active aspects. An emotion, consequently, is only a mental attitude in a state of excitement, and has no separate or independent existence.

II.

While there is no limit to the states called emotional, except that of general and almost infinitely varying interests, some of the emotions are yet well defined and discharge themselves along instinctive lines of activity or bring instinctive relief from unrest. Naturally, too, certain emotions are more fundamental than others, and those which are so, such as anger and fear, are common to most of the higher animals and their young and have their lines of development and discharge determined hereditarily.

The first thing we may learn, therefore, from an ethical standpoint is that emotions, or at all events pronounced emotions, are not indispensable in civilized life, for since an emotion represents but mental excitement, it lies within the range of possibility to avoid that excitement, *i. e.*, while desiring, thinking and acting are essential to life, *e. g.*, to the life even of the uncompromising Stoic, emotions are not equally indispensable. We may, therefore, ask the question how far emotions are ethically justifiable.

As to the master emotions their case is the most evident from a moral point of view. In animals generally, and also in the earlier stages of human development, it is essential that reaction should, as a rule, be instantaneous and appropriate, for the capacity for reflection exists then but to the slightest degree and adaptations of a far-reaching kind are, therefore, impossible, especially considering that adjustments relating to the far future are inappropriate and useless in a primitive environment. Certain practical attitudes, associated namely with marked excitement, anger, fear, revenge, jealousy, are accordingly developed to protect the primitive individual automatically. The place of reflection is here occupied by an inherited reflex mechanism, and though the consequent reactions of such a mechanism would be necessarily inappropriate in the extreme within a complex society, they suffice for primitive beings primitively placed. With high mental development the readily acting reflex mechanism does not disappear; but the need for it has almost passed. The civilized person's relation to the world around him is complicated, and owing also to his being a part of a highly evolved community, he has no need to react quasi-mechanically. He may allow trained impulses to do thoroughly what fitful anger, fear or jealousy would otherwise most imperfectly accomplish. When, for instance, some one is wronged, instead of being angry, he may address himself to some appropriate impulse in his would-be enemy, calmly prevent him from acting unrighteously, or appeal to the law.

A highly advanced being adjusts his actions in accordance

with a general ideal, that is, in accommodating himself to the present, he takes into account the future. His aim is not to deal out rough justice, but strict justice. Excitement, he knows, generally emphasizes the needs of the moment at the expense of those of futurity, and accordingly he is averse to acting when in anger or in passion, unless he has first weighed the matter. An emotion suggests, as Bain has pointed out, a more or less self-centred idea, and tends, as a consequence, to interpret everything from its own point of view. The advanced ethical man, therefore, will proceed, prompted by powerful and trained sentiments which have primarily respect for universal well-being, and will not act on the basis of sudden emotions, except of such as have been aroused as the result of examining a case in a judicial spirit.

To live according to broad principles is the tendency of highly developed beings. This implies that we ought not to be governed by suddenly upwelling emotions, but rather by sentiments of a most comprehensive type, and that without anger, fear, indignation, hatred, contempt, disdain, envy, jealousy, malice, pride, arrogance and shame, one may pass an eminently innocent and useful life. The judge may be just and severe in his judgments without in any way being either unemotional or unduly influenced by emotions out of accord with the general justice of the case. Our sense of right and truth, our systematized conception of life, our respect for all sides of our nature and for the common good, the inclination towards living a consistent life, and broad-based sentiments, are guides which replace rather than supplement the primitive emotions.

Like and dislike, delight and sorrow, love of truth, justice and beauty, might be said to be the minimum for man in the way of emotions, if, indeed, any of these here named can be regarded as emotions, for the first few are perhaps pleasure-pain attitudes, and the latter perhaps only refers to sentiments or inclinations. We are, for instance, glad that our son is a good scholar (without being proud of him), that a certain person is near us (without loving him), and that we are able to protect ourselves (without being revengeful). We can dispense with by far the greater number of emotions and sentiments.

Though many emotions, and especially the primitive ones, become superfluous or of little account with social advance, yet it appears difficult to imagine that men, however advanced, should not *pity* him who suffers, or that we should not warmly *love* our offspring. It is well to remember that the only thinkable and defensible ground on which men can agree for opposing a course of thought or action is its incompatibility with the total individual and social life, and that any other standard

demolishes itself. Consequently, in so far as an emotion or indeed any practical attitude deleteriously affects life as a whole, so far is it to be suppressed, while when an emotion proves to be helpful, its cultivation is morally imperative. The abrupt, irresponsible, blinding emotions, such as rage or terror, may be safely discouraged, for the love of a comprehensive ideal can replace them; but the tender emotions, such as sympathy, pity, and kindness, need only be guarded against when they tend to become unjust to life as an organized complex. The advanced ethical man, if this be true, will be endowed with emotions; but he will not permit them by their impulsiveness to endanger or nullify the rights of the other parts of his nature. Indeed, heartiness and boisterousness are probably more satisfying and argue a richer and robuster nature than stiffness and immovability, and, therefore, ethically speaking, we ought not to aim at the total suppression of the emotions, but rather at limiting them to their legitimate sphere of influence. Absence of impulse, desire and emotion do not accordingly distinguish our ideal of a man; for he who only acts from a sense of duty and has no love for his kind stirring in his breast, is scarcely a human being at all, leaving aside the implied neglect of the additional stimulus to right conduct which, as Bishop Butler has pointed out, is supplied by the affections.

Again, if we are to lead a useful life, mental excitement cannot be avoided altogether, for sometimes we have to decide hurriedly between alternatives, *e. g.*, as to whether we are to catch the train now about to depart or go by some later one, in which case there is no room for calm deliberation, and especially is this so since we must recognize an emotional state even when the perturbation is very feeble.

Many of the so-called emotions are really not emotions at all, though the precise border between excitement and absence of excitement is as difficult to ascertain as the frontier between excitement and mental and physical confusion or prostration. We sometimes say "I *fear* he will come," "I am *sorry* for him," "I *pity* his lot," "I *dislike* him," "I am *angry* and *indignant*," when we mean "I have reason to think that evil will result from his coming," "I should have saved him trouble if it had been in my power," "I would improve his lot if I could," "I am not attracted by him," "I am not favorably impressed." In these instances there is but the veriest atom of excitement, and thus, with ethical advance, the vocabulary of emotion is deprived of a large part of its meaning and becomes almost wholly metaphorical, that is most of the emotions lose nearly all their intensity. If the Stoic, as Marcus Aurelius Antoninus describes him, or the Cynic, as Epictetus draws him, represents the most advanced ethical type, then the ideal man is

ever serene and gentle, and never unjust by reason of his emotions. Such, too, has been "the ideal of ancient sages," for Confucius, Buddha, Socrates, Jesus, Marcus Aurelius, all typify serenity, and the phrase "an excitable saint" approaches to a contradiction in terms. And yet it is difficult to determine the golden mean which shall do justice to human nature as such. Is it not rather that, instead of being coldly intellectual, the advanced ethical man is full of fire and vivacity, and that he only differs from those who rank below him in never having evil or superfluous emotions such as rage or pride, and that his emotions never make him act unfairly to himself or to his fellows? The above view follows that of Prof. James, who says that a non-emotional existence, "although it seems to have been the ideal of ancient sages, is too apathetic to be keenly sought after by those born after the revival of the worship of sensibility, a few generations ago" (p. 453). Modern ethics will have nothing to do with an ascetic view of life or a pessimistic theory of human nature. Let the petty emotions and the mischievous ones and most of the primitive ones go or be applied only under primitive conditions; let the gentle emotions, the useful ones and the great ones be encouraged; and let the emotions have no unsettling influence over our conception of life as a consistent unity. The result will be a being completely capable of self-control and never requiring much of such control, gentle in manner, self-possessed, stern when necessary, and bubbling over with the joy of life and action. Such a being would be free from pride, arrogance, humility, envy, jealousy, ambitiousness, anger, hatred, scorn, contempt, and all the related brood of semi-civilized and petty emotional states, sentiments, and practical attitudes. His heart, on the contrary, would overflow with sociability and pity, with a warm desire for doing justice and defeating injustice, and with a love of truth, beauty, goodness and nature.

III.

On the psychological side the conclusions arrived at in this paper as regards the nature of the emotions are far from claiming that they close or exhaust the inquiry. While insisting that physical together with cognitive and volitional excitement, directly induced by some definite object or idea, appear as invariable concomitants in an emotion and that an emotion is a mental attitude in a state of excitement, we have left undefined the problem of the exact nature of the excitement, as in anger and fear, in rejoicing and grieving. The term excitement, in other words, but vaguely hints at the passive factors involved in an emotion which tends, in the one direction, to a cold inclination, and, in the other, to mental and physical

chaos. Secondly, we have attempted, by the method of exclusion, to separate strictly emotional from non-emotional states, and we excluded, on the ground of absence of excitement directly aroused by a definite object or idea, Inclination, Habit, Sentiment, Passion, Secondary Emotions, Temperament, Mood, Diffused Excitement, Desire, Craving and Impulse. Still, the enormous number of so-called emotions, bewildering in their variety and relationships, requires to be explained and to be reduced to order, and, as Prof. Irons well shows in the volume alluded to, the list of the emotions demands to be reconstructed. Here we can only suggest that since the circumstances which arouse emotions give rise to an infinite variety of ways of grappling with them, there is no limit to the possible variety in emotions and classes of emotions. To this must be added that the emotions as they were conceived of before the era of scientific analysis, are largely misinterpreted through the almost invariable presence in them of countless non-emotional elements. Perhaps, too, most states, if not all, have an emotional aspect, and are as yet not recognized as such because the excitement is relatively feeble and is, therefore, overlooked. Suffice it to have drawn attention to the importance of doing greater justice to the careful analysis of the cognitive and volitional elements in emotions as they are experienced. It may be, after all, that not until the more general truths of normal psychology are well established, shall we be quite clear as to what is and what is not to be included in emotional states and what are their fundamental characteristics. Perhaps we shall find then to our surprise, as we have already endeavored to show, that there are strictly speaking no emotions, and that what we call emotions are directly aroused attitudes in a state of excitement. We should, on this principle, understand at once the great multiplicity of the so-called emotions and the variety of explanations concerning them.

The problem does not seem so complicated on the ethical side. That the primitive emotions, such as anger and fear, partake of the nature of instincts is as evident as that with the growth of civilization the violence, the reflex character, and the imperial sway of these emotions are steadily discouraged, and that in the end there remain a few master sentiments, appropriate to the new conditions—sociability, respect for self and others, pity, and love of doing justice to the whole nature of man. We recognize here three stages: the primary and instinctive one, where there are a few headstrong emotions which only take directly into account the good of the moment; a transitional and semi-anarchic period, where an army of emotional and other attitudes, such as pride, ambition, contempt, shame, conceit and love of glory develop; and a final and or-

dered stage, where a few impulses, principles, emotions and more especially sentiments of a comprehensive character, harmoniously seek to do justice to the individual, to society, and to nature, as an interdependent whole. The intellectualist who dreams of a golden age when men will despise emotions and sentiments and be wholly guided by reason, meets with no support from the above analysis; nor does the moralist find favor who exalts the sense of duty and the possession of principles and despises the affections and the joy of life; nor again are those encouraged who plead for the so-called artistic temperament which would perpetuate the present stage of rule by innumerable petty emotions. Speaking generally, primitive virility, if one may prophesy, will remain, while a few broad-based and powerful sentiments will take the place of the few imperious emotions which dominate primitive life.